

FIFTY-TWO CARDS, THREE AGE TIERS

Father and Son Conversation Cards

One card a week, in a slot that already exists in your day.

The problem is almost never that a father does not want to talk to his son. It is that the moment never gets scheduled, so it waits for a natural opening, and the natural opening does not come - or it comes at fourteen, when the habit was supposed to have been built at eight. These are fifty-two questions sorted by age, designed to be asked in the car, at a table, or on a walk. One a week, for a year.

- Fifty-two cards, eight to a page, with cut lines
- Three tiers: ages 5 to 8, 9 to 12, and 13 to 17
- Written to be asked sideways - in a car, on a walk, not across a desk
- A one-page guide on running it, including what to do when he says nothing
- Works for a daughter too, with four cards you may want to reword

One card a week is fifty-two conversations a year. Most fathers get fewer.

Break the cycle. Build the system. Be the man.

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For personal and small-group use.

How to run this

Give it a slot

The single reason this fails is that it stays a good idea. Pick the slot now: the drive to practice, Saturday breakfast, the ten minutes after the younger ones are down. It has to be a slot that already exists in your week, because a new one you invent will be the first thing cut in a busy month.

Ask it sideways

Boys talk better beside you than opposite you. A car is the best room in the house for this - no eye contact required, a fixed end point, and no way for either of you to leave. A walk is second. A conversation announced as a conversation, across a table, with your full attention on his face, is the hardest possible version and most fathers try that one first and conclude their son does not talk.

You answer first

Every card, you go first, and you answer it honestly rather than instructively. If the card asks about a time you were afraid, and you supply a story where you were afraid and then handled it well, you have taught him that the correct answer is a story where you come out fine - and he will supply those from then on.

When he says nothing

- Let the silence run. Count to ten in your head. Most fathers fill it at four, and the filling is what ends the conversation.
- Do not ask it again in different words. That reads as pressure, and he will answer to end it rather than to tell you anything.
- Say "you can think about it" and move on. Put the card back in the deck. A card asked at nine and refused often gets answered at eleven.
- Never make him pay for a refusal - no comment about it later, no mention to his mother in front of him. One of those costs you a year.

The one rule about what he tells you

If he tells you something hard, your job in that moment is to receive it, not to solve it or react to it. Whatever your face does in the first two seconds is what determines whether he brings you the next one. There is time to respond later. There is no second chance at the first two seconds.

If something he says makes you think he is being hurt, or is in danger, that is the point where a card deck is finished and a person needs to be involved that day. Say plainly that you are glad he told you, that he has not done anything wrong, and that you are going to get help - and then do it.

AGES 5-8

What was the best part of today, and what was the worst part?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

If you could be in charge of the house for one day, what would you change first?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is something you are good at that nobody has noticed yet?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

Who at school is hard to be around? What makes them hard?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is something that scares you that you have not told anybody?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What do you think I do all day when I am at work?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is a rule in our house you think is unfair? Tell me why.

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

When you feel angry, where do you feel it in your body first?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is the kindest thing anybody has done for you this week?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

If you did something wrong, what would make it easier to tell me?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is something you wish we did more often, just us two?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What do you think God is like? You can say you do not know.

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is something you have that you would be willing to give away?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

Who do you want to be like when you grow up, and why that person?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What is a question you have asked before and nobody answered properly?

BE THE MAN

AGES 5-8

What do you like about yourself? Take your time on this one.

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is something everyone at school believes that you think is wrong?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

When was the last time you felt left out? What happened?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is something I do that annoys you? I will not get upset.

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is the hardest thing about being your age that adults forget?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

Have you ever been asked to keep a secret you did not want to keep?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What do you do when you are angry and you cannot say anything?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is something you have seen online that you wish you had not?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

Who is a friend of yours I have never asked about? Tell me about him.

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is something you are worried about that you think is too small to mention?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

If money did not matter, how would you want to spend your life?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What do you think makes someone a good man? Give me three things.

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

When have you seen me get something wrong? What should I have done?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is a promise somebody made to you and broke?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is something you believe about God that you are not sure about?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What would you do if a friend asked you to do something you knew was wrong?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What do you think our family is like, compared to other families?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What is one thing you wish I would stop asking you about?

BE THE MAN

AGES 9-12

What are you proud of that you have never told anyone?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What is something you think I am wrong about? Make your case properly.

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What do people at school think you are, that you are not?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

When was the last time you were genuinely afraid? Of what?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What is the pressure nobody talks about at your age?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What would you do if you got into real trouble - would you call me?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

If the answer is no, what would have to be different for it to be yes?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What do you think a man owes his family? Where did you get that idea?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What have you seen me do that you do not want to repeat?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What do you actually believe, as opposed to what you would say at church?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

Who are you around your friends that you are not around us?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What is something you are carrying that you have not put down?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What do you think happens to you after you die? Say what you really think.

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What is the hardest thing about being talked to as a kid when you are not?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

How do you want to be treated when you get something badly wrong?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What is something you want to do with your life that you have not said out loud?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What do you think I am afraid of? You are probably right.

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

What would make it easier to tell me something you knew I would hate?

BE THE MAN

AGES 13-17

When you are my age, what do you want to be able to say about your father?

BE THE MAN

The year

Fifty-two cards is one a week for a year. Tick them off. A father who plans fifty-two and manages twenty-nine has had twenty-nine conversations he would not otherwise have had, and that is not a failure - it is the number, and the number is the point.

WEEK	CARD ASKED	WHAT HE SAID THAT SURPRISED ME
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		

What to do with what he tells you

Write it down

Not in front of him. Afterwards, in the car park, in a note on your phone. You will think you will remember it. You will remember the fact of the conversation and lose the sentence, and the sentence was the part that mattered.

Bring it back once

Two or three weeks later, refer to the thing he said, briefly, without making an occasion of it. That single act does more than the original conversation - it tells him the things he says are retained rather than processed and discarded, and that is the entire basis on which a teenager decides whether to tell his father anything.

Do not report it

Not to his mother in front of him, not to family, not as an anecdote at church. If it needs to go to his mother, and some of it will, tell him it is going and why. A boy who finds out his answers travel will give you answers designed to travel.

If nothing works for a season

There are months where a son will not talk, and it is usually not about you. Keep asking anyway, keep the slot, and lower the stakes - go back to the younger tier for a while. A father who keeps showing up at the same time each week while getting nothing is building something that will not show up for a year. That is a long time to work without evidence, and it is still the job.

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